MATERIALS FOR THE STUDY OF THE WORK AND THOUGHT OF ARNOLD J. TOYNBEE

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WRITINGS ON THE EMPIRES IN WORLD HISTORY, II

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ISLAM IN RUSSIA SINCE THE REVOLUTION

by Arnold J. Toynbee

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At a meeting of the Society on May 22, 1918, with Colonel Sir Henry Trotter in the chair, Mr. Arnold J. Toynbee lectured on this subject. In the course of an extemporaneous address he said:

I must ask you to excuse the charlatanism of one who has not travelled among the Russian Moslems and does not know their languages in venturing to lecture upon them. My excuse is that Islam in Russia was, before the Revolution, an unknown field – at least, compared with other fields of sociological study in Asia and Europe. It is characteristic of our lack of knowledge that we do not know whether to call it an Asiatic or a European problem.

This ignorance is due to the Russian autocracy, which crushed all free movement among the various people of that great Empire. As we now know, Russia was teeming with life – with nationalities, parties, classes, sects, with cherished aims and original points of view; but all this life was held down by the Tsardom. Under the old regime Russia presented herself to the outer world as politically (not spiritually, of course) a military machine, which might be on the right or wrong side; for us or against us, but was essentially a formidable machine, and not a nation or commonwealth of peoples. Thus the Russian Moslems passed unnoticed, although it was obvious that they were bound to be important. To begin with, they were, numerically important. There were 19.000.000 Mohammedans in Russia, or hardly a smaller number than the Moslems under the rule of France. Thus Russia was the third largest Moslem power in the world – larger, probably, than Holland with her East Indian possessions, and

[1] «Journal of the Central Asian Society», LV (1917), 1, pp. 73-83.

larger, of course, than any independent Moslem State. There are 16.000.000 Turkish-speaking Moslems in the Russian Empire, or twice as many as in the Ottoman Empire.

Geographically, also, they are bound to be important, because they are likely to be one of the main transitional elements between European and Islamic civilisation. Throughout history there have been two routes, geographically, by which the East and the West have come into contact. There has been the sea route, by which British, French, and Dutch traders have gone to tropical lands and founded Empire in Eastern countries. Most of the contact of Europe with the Mohammedan world has been by sea, and the ocean has served as sharp dividing line between the two civilisations. When the Englishman, the Dutchman, or the Frenchman made their way by sea to distant countries of the East, they found the inhabitants sharply divided from themselves in history, manners, and standards of civilisation. The sea routes during the last few centuries have been paramount in the formation of our ideas of the relations between Europe and Asia – we have thought of the problem in terms of them. Yet all the while there has been another bridge of contact, the land routes, along which differing civilisations have shaded into one another. If the importance of these routes has been very much overlooked, the reason is that they were by way of Russia and Turkey, and the government of both countries being reactionary, the national and social tendencies of the peoples of both Empires were suppressed. But the war, which has overthrown the Tsardom, and will, it is hoped, overthrow Turkish rule over other peoples, will perhaps put the decision of the relations between East and West in the hands of the nations on the land bridge. At any rate, they will influence those relations to a much greater extent than hitherto.

The Russian Moslems at least provide the material for just such a transitional element between East and West as I have mentioned. They include Moslems more Europeanised than any others – practically Europeans of Moslem religion. I refer to those of the Volga region, who are geographically encircled by European civilisation. Again, the Russian Moslems include nomadic tribes and countries which till half a century ago were the most isolated and fanatical of any in Islam, being still in the full dark age produced by the barbarian invasions. In other parts of Russia there are Islamic peoples who have taken a full share in the great economic development of the country. The Russian Moslems include modern industrialists, peasants who are specialists in cotton growing and other forms of profitable

industry, and, again, the populations of the Steppes, who are pure nomads. Indeed, you find almost every type of economic life and culture, from the prosperous and enterprising, to that which is wholly untouched by European influences.

After these generalisations I must attempt a rapid survey. The first group of which I would speak are the Moslems of what may be termed the Volga-Ural-West Siberia region. Their centre is at Kazan, and they speak a Turkish dialect. Their number is estimated at four to five millions. Their conversion to Islam dates from about a.d. 960, perhaps a generation before Christianity reached Russia. They were extra-ordinarily isolated from the outer world by the Steppes and by the pagan Turkish tribes intervening between them and Persia for about four centuries, just as the Christians of Russia were also cut off by nomadic tribes from contact with the peoples from whom they had drawn their civilisation and religion. Friar Rubruck, who visited the Steppes in the thirteenth century, heard of these Islamic tribes, and he was very muck perturbed in consequence. «I wonder», he wrote, «what devil carried the religion of Mohammed thither». This region was converted to Islam something like four centuries before the Steppe to the south of it. But about 1250 the Steppe and Kazan were united under the Mongols of the Golden Horde, and the conversion of the Steppe followed. The Steppe began to settle down in civilised fashion, and the Volga Moslems acquired a Turkish dialect, one which varies from type more than any other, probably because the populations previously spoke Finnish. The result of the rule of the Golden Horde for a period of three centuries was that the Steppe country and Kazan were welded together into a single Moslem Turkish-speaking population. Then there came the Russian conquest about a.d. 1550. From that time these Moslems have been continuously under the rule of a European and non-Moslem State. They are, indeed, the oldest Moslem group to have been continually under European rule, for though the Moors in Spain were conquered earlier by a Christian State, they were either stamped out or forced to emigrate. But the Russians allowed these Tatar Moslems to continue, and so for more than three and a half centuries Europeans and Moslems have lived under one European Government in the region of the Volga.

There are various sub-groups to whom reference should be made. First of all there are the Tatars of Kazan. They form a majority of Moslems in no single province, and only in two out of ten districts of the province of Kazan. They are mostly townsfolk, business and

professional men, and artisans. Since 1905 they have taken a vigorous part in Russian politics, and have developed a press and literature. Until 1917 they worked with the Cadet party, a fact which shows that they are *bourgeois* in their point of view – Liberals, but not Socialists, nor very much interested in the nationalisation of land. They are, in fact, a prosperous middle-class element

The second sub-group, the Bashkirs in the Urals, are more backward. Fifty years ago they were entirely nomadic, and they are still partially nomadic. They are more compact than the Tatars, and in the Ufa province they are in an actual majority, though only a slight majority, over the Russians. That is to say, there is a majority of Moslem elements, including the Tatars. They are also numerous in Orenburg, Samara, and Perm. But the tendency is for them to be swamped by Russian colonists, who have settled in these regions in large numbers in the last fifty years. Great tracts of country are now under tillage by the Russian peasants, and the Bashkirs are being crowded out in some districts. So far they have been under Tatar influence. There are many *Tatars* to be found in the towns. But the compactness of the Bashkirs and the special problem of Russian colonisation have tended of late to produce a different policy among them.

The third sub-group is that of the Siberian Tatars. They are the remains of a sub-khanate of the Golden Horde. They are to be found mostly in the older towns of Western Siberia, such as Tobolsk, and they are less connected with the modem towns along the Trans-Siberian Railway, where Russian civilisation has been developing latterly. A great many of them may be Tatarised Finns or Samoyeds; but the original Tatars have maintained their identity. They are an important element in trade as well as in Moslem culture. Incidentally it may be mentioned that the earliest political leader of Islamic Russia came from Siberia. I refer to Sheikh Abdurrashid Ibrahim, who is an old man now. He was born at Tara in 1842, and was the earliest Russian Moslem to travel to the different Moslem centres in Russia in the interests of Moslem culture and unity. He visited Moslem centres all over the world, and he was a member of the second Duma.

I now come to another and very different main Moslem group, that of Kirghizistan. This group, numbering about five millions, represents the old nomadic population of the Steppes from the Carpathians to Altai and Thian-Shan. They were probably outside the jurisdiction

of the Golden Horde, and only drifted into its camping grounds after its power had been broken. They were the latest people in Asia to be converted to Islam, and the process was only completed in the last century, after they had come under Russian rule. The Kirghiz are still practically pure nomads, and I imagine that Islam has only touched them superficially at present, while they are touched scarcely at all by European civilisation. Since the end of the fifteenth century the nomad have been crowded out of the Steppes, like the Red Indians on the prairies of North America. The process was begun by the Cossacks, who early in the sixteenth century came down from the region of the Dnieper and made settlements along the rivers of the Steppes. In the seventeenth century, too, the Kalmucks came from Mongolia westward and settled on the Eastern Steppes, and this had a disintegrating effect on the nomadic tribes. In the third place, there has been considerable Russian colonisation from the north during the last twenty years, and especially since the building of the Trans-Siberian Railway. The movement has been on so large a scale that it is comparable in character with the colonisation of the West in the United States and in Canada. That, of course, has resulted in crowding out the Kirghiz, who have either had to take to agriculture and settled life or to vacate the northern part of the Steppes. They are to be found in the Eastern Steppe still; but if the colonisation movement continues, that Steppe, like the Western, will be covered with European peasantry within, say, the next twenty years. The Kirghiz themselves now belong to the Eastern extremity. They spread to the Volga in the sixteenth century, filling the vacuum left by the Usbegs, under the pressure of the Kalmucks.

The third main group of Russian Moslems is that of the Caucasus where there are about four million of them. The Caucasus is a second Balkan peninsula, and harbours a confusion of nationalities and religions, hitherto banded together by a military empire, though in this case a Christian empire. The position of the Moslems is best understood by classifying them in sub-groups.

There are, first of all, the Azerbaijanis, forming by far the largest sub-group, and believed by some authorities to number 2.500.000. They are the “Tatars of the Caucasus”, a Turkish-speaking population who drifted in from the tenth to the thirteenth centuries. They came up the Araxes valley, the highroad of migration from Central Asia to Anatolia. They are identical with the Turkish-speaking population of Persian Azerbaijan, being only separated from them

politically by the Russian conquest a century ago. Baku, the great oil city of the Caucasus, is not their home in the full sense. It is not really a Tatar city, for the population is Russian, Armenian, and Persian, together with many foreign elements. The Tatars only share in its cosmopolitanism. But there are amongst them several important men who have taken a very prominent part in Moslem politics in Russia. They include some self-made millionaires. They are less civilised, but more vigorous and also more drastic and radical in their views, than the Kazan Moslems, who have an older Moslem civilisation and greater contact with European influence.

Another sub-group is that of the Daghestanis, who are thought to number about a million. They are very much split up, some of them belonging to indigenous tribes, and some to tribes deposited from the Steppes. They are confined to the North-Eastern Caucasus.

Thirdly, there are the Georgian Moslems in the extreme south-west, in the provinces which Turkey has seized under the provisions of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty. These people are Georgians in nationality and language. They became converted to Islam after the Turkish conquest in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, just as the Albanians were largely converted after the Turkish conquest in Europe. It has been a matter of discussion whether they ought to belong to a Moslem State or a Georgian State, but the Turks have settled the matter for the moment by occupying the country once again by force.

In the fourth place there are the Crimean Tatars, numbering perhaps 200.000, again a fragment of the people of the Steppes, chiefly in the mountains of the coast. They are much outnumbered by the Russians and Ukrainians. The last sub-group is that of the Tatar nobles in Lithuania, numbering perhaps 10.000. They were invited to the country by the Lithuanian Government in the fifteenth or sixteenth century, and have since been settled there. They have kept their religion, and form a really important social factor, though only a very scattered community, in the territory occupied by Germany on the basis of the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk.

The last main group of which I have to speak is that of Central Asia, where there are not less than five million Moslems hitherto under Russian rule. I refer to inhabitants of settled regions where there are towns and cultivation of the land. Perhaps about 80 per cent. of the Central Asiatic Moslems are Turkish-speaking, their dialect being closely related to that

spoken over the frontier in Chinese Turkestan. The remainder are Tajiks, the relics of an original Iranian population, and speaking Iranian dialects. These are townsmen and cultivators. They have suffered by constant invasions, and notably by the Uzbeg conquest at the beginning of the sixteenth century, after the break up of the Golden Horde. Before the Russian conquest, which went on from 1863 to 1886, they were in the full dark age, broken up into a number of petty Khanates, and subjected to constant wars and slave raiding. Great areas of land went out of cultivation, and exhausting taxation was in force. Since the Russian conquest there has been security, a steady growth in communications, following on that remarkable engineering feat the Trans-Caspian Railway, which brings Central Asia into direct communication with Europe, and also profitable specialisation in agriculture. This is especially noteworthy in respect of cotton. The great cotton mills of Moscow are largely dependent on the cotton-growing districts of Central Asia, which were developed for the purpose of enabling Russia to become independent of the American market. Thus over hundreds of square miles within the Russian frontier, and especially in the province of Ferghana, the peasantry have been encouraged to specialise in cotton cultivation. Formerly, while the country was insecure, it was so isolated economically that the peasants produced only the absolute necessities of life for themselves, because there was no certainty of trade or communication. But when the Russians developed the railways and paid advances for the prospective cotton crop, the peasantry began to plough up their cornfields and to substitute cotton. It was the State policy to obtain foodstuffs for Central Asia very cheaply from European Russia. Thus, economically at any rate, there was rapid growth and organisation, notwithstanding the fact that Central Asia, as is natural, remains in culture the most Oriental and the least assimilated region in Russia.

From this survey it is clear that the Russian Moslems came under Russian rule at very different dates; that they are widely scattered geographically; and that there are a great many different nationalities, degrees of civilisation, and forms of economic life among them. Sixteen millions out of the nineteen millions speak different Turkish dialects, but these almost amount to different languages. There are three main groups of these dialects, and the Osmanli Turkish spoken in Asia Minor is very different from the form of Turkish spoken in Kazan. This forms a considerable barrier in communication between the Kazan Moslems

and other Turkish-speaking peoples of the Empire. But while there are many divisions, there are certain great principles of unity tending to bring them together. First, of course, there is Islam, in which the ties and claims of brotherhood are still very strong. They are made the stronger by the fact that the Mohammedan world has felt itself latterly to be on the defensive against penetration from Europe. Then another great point of unity has been the existence of the Russian State, with its conquests, its centralised administration, and its railways, not only round, but across the Steppes. There were rough tracks along the Steppes in the old days, but communications in any real sense did not exist before the Russian conquest. The Rostov-Baku, the Trans-Caspian, and the Orenburg-Tashkent Railways have had a great unifying influence. Most important of all was the economic reciprocity which was being worked out before the war.

On the other hand, there are centrifugal principles at work. Though the Russian conquest was fundamentally unifying in effect, the Russian Government was severe, and this tended to create a Moslem opposition. The Government took care to promote ecclesiastical decentralisation, though the Moslem ecclesiastics were allowed considerable liberty locally in organising their own communities. There was one ecclesiastical centre for the Tatars of the Volga, another for the Caucasus, and so on. Then, again, there was differentiation as to military service, which was confined to the Moslems of the Volga-Ural, Siberia, and the Crimea. Some groups were much more amalgamated with the Empire than others, and it was on this basis that the differentiation was made. Again, there are the special interests of various elements to be considered, such as the fear of the Bashkirs and Kirghiz as to the effects of Russian colonisation.

All these factors were more or less in suspense under the Tsardom; but since the Revolution the various forces concerned have found free play, and have begun to work out the problems affecting them. The first tendency to assert itself was towards unity and cultural autonomy. The All-Russian Moslem movement was led by the scattered Moslems, especially the Kazan Tatars, and others who had been the longest under Russian rule. They naturally felt that Moslem unity within a united Russia was the only solution of their political problem, since they were so scattered themselves that it was only by having a great Moslem block that they could hold their own in the Russian State. Supposing the Moslems more recently

incorporated in the Empire broke away, they felt that they themselves would be left as a small scattered minority amongst the Russian population. On the other hand, the unity of the Moslems would make them a political power within the Russian Empire. Thus the Kazan Tatars went in for a policy of bringing the forces of Islam together within the Russian political system in order to form a Moslem party in the Russian State, and to exercise a marked Islamic influence on its policy.

These views, shared by many other groups, were especially dominant during the first period after the Revolution. In April, 1917, there was a Moslem Conference in the Caucasus, attended by delegates from all parts. The Sheikh-ul-Islam of the Shia Moslems of the Caucasus and the Mufti of the Sunnis publicly embraced before the whole assembly, amid demonstrations of great enthusiasm. They even began to talk of abolishing the separate ecclesiastical organisations; and forming an ecclesiastical, and not merely political, Moslem union for the Caucasus. This is an extraordinary fact when we bear in mind how strong has been the traditional separatism between the two great sects of Islam, in Russia as elsewhere. The Conference passed a resolution in favour of All-Russian Moslem co-operation.

Accordingly a few weeks afterwards, in May, 1917, there was an All-Russian Moslem Conference at Moscow. It was characteristic that the official language was Russian, since this was the only language in which all the delegates could understand one another. The delegates, or one large section of them, went strongly in favour of the All Russian movement. They appointed an All-Russian Moslem Council, with an executive committee at Petrograd, which has produced a weekly bulletin for the Moslems on the course of affairs. The remarkable thing about this bulletin is that it is not merely confined to the affairs of the Russian Moslems, but shows an even greater interest in general events and in the course of the Revolution. The Conference also established an All-Russian Ecclesiastical Council at Ufa, to be the centre for all the groups, and to have authority over all the Moslems in Russia.

The tone of the proceedings was very democratic, and though the six members of the Ecclesiastical Council were not appointed by universal suffrage, that was laid down as the basis of their election for the future. There was a noteworthy development of feminism. Out of the 800 delegates at Moscow, over 100 were women, and a woman was elected to be one of the six members of the supreme Ecclesiastical Council. Thus we see a very pronounced

Liberal movement brought into relation with the idea of Islamic cultural unity within the Russian State. The Conference did not ask for the formation of separate federal Moslem States, because they felt that that would be a barrier to their unity for the work of cultural autonomy. It is interesting to note how sensitive the Conference was in respect of the world of Islam. The leaders broke with the Cadets on the question of the future of Constantinople, since the latter still favoured its acquisition by Russia. They formed a party of their own gravitating toward the Left, though not toward the extreme Left.

But another tendency quickly declared itself, in consequence of the course of events in Russia, and that was a tendency toward political or territorial autonomy, whether under a federal system or on the basis of complete independence. The first sign of this came from the Daghestanis, who held a rival May Conference at Astrakhan, and complained of the Azerbaijanis trying to Tatarise the Caucasus. As a matter of fact, the Azerbaijani Tatars are at the head of this territorial movement. Their ideal was almost from the beginning a territorial State with complete local political autonomy, including all the Turkish-speaking populations of the Caucasus. Federation with Russia was a subordinate feature; the main idea was that of forming a State of their own, and federation with Russia was put in rather for form's sake. This was obviously a more drastic solution of the Moslem question. But the Bokharans were still more intolerant and drastic. There was a local revolution, and the Khan was forced to agree to a democratic Constitution. Then followed a reaction against the Young Bokharan party, which was given a fanatical turn by the Mullahs and was favoured by the Russian Resident at Bokhara. He belonged to the old régime, and was anti-revolutionary. These disturbances were put down, but they were bound to have a discouraging effect upon the idea of Moslem unity in Russia. The tendency for a separatist solution has steadily won, in consequence of the general course of events. The Bolshevik revolution and acquisition of power has turned the scales all over Russia in favour of separatism and against unity, and the Moslems have shared in this tendency. Even at a Conference held at Ufa last December to appoint a commission for working out cultural autonomy, the territorialists carried territorial resolutions and appointed a committee of their own. A few weeks earlier there had been a proclamation of the territorial autonomy of Bashkiristan. All this is an unhappy turn of policy; but probably it is merely a symptom of the general disorganisation of Russia. If

Russia (or parts of her) comes together again in a Federation, the idea of unity among Russian Moslems may revive.

In conclusion Mr. Toynbee read from a German paper (the «Neuer Orient») extracts from speeches on the great question at issue at the Moscow Conference between the two leaders – Tsalikov of the All-Russian Party and Rasulzada the territorialist from Baku.

The CHAIRMAN said they were very much indebted to Mr. Toynbee for the care and trouble he had taken to collect and co-ordinate the facts respecting the Russian Moslems. He saw from that day's paper that the new cry at Berlin to replace or supplement "Berlin to Baghdad" was to be "Hamburg to Herat", a much longer line. The existence of such ambitions was important, and it was very desirable that we should inform ourselves, and that the country should inform itself, respecting the populations occupying the lands through which penetration was desired by our enemies. There was an enormous population taken altogether in those lands, and beyond them we had some 70.000.000 Moslems within the Indian Empire. It was noteworthy how large a proportion of the Russian Moslems spoke various forms of Turkish.

Colonel Sir THOMAS HOLDICH said that one statement in the lecture had surprised him. A glance at the map would show how enormous a proportion of Russia was Moslem country. He believed it would amount to four-fifths. While it could be taken for granted that the Moslems were very much scattered over that vast area, and that much of it was very thinly peopled, there were still very large compact bodies of Moslems there, especially in high Asia, and notably in Bokhara. The Central Asian people were Sunni Mohammedans to a man, and amongst them, so far as he knew, there was no scattered Christian Church or any other non-Moslem faith. On these grounds he could not help thinking that in the Russian Empire as we have known it there must surely be far more than 19.000.000 Mohammedans. The inhabitants of Russia might be divided into Slavs and Moslems, mainly Turkish-speaking Moslems. That being so, it was still more remarkable that in consequence of the Revolution there should have been any decided expression of opinion on the part of a large body of them in favour of unity within the Russian State. It was entirely contrary to what they had heard as to the results of the Revolution in other respects. The exact opposite of unity was

its most patent political principle. It was difficult to see how 19.000.000 Mahomedans among 180.000.000 Slavs could make themselves quite sufficiently prominent and powerful in the political future of Russia to effect anything very great. Toward the end of his address the lecturer had shown that there were very considerable differences of opinion amongst the leaders of the Russian Moslems as to their political future. One could easily understand that within certain limits really powerful Mohammedan republics might be formed, but that they could have any decided influence over the vast mass of the Russian people he confessed he did not believe.

He would like to ask Mr. Toynbee what bad been the attitude of the Russian Moslems during the war. Did they recognise the Sultan of Turkey as the head of their faith, or were they, like the Mohammedans of India, very doubtful indeed about the particular position which the Ottoman Emperor claimed in this respect? We did not find that, taking it all together – though there were, of course, exceptions – the Mohammedans of India in the Army had very particular objections against fighting the Mohammedans of Turkey. Did the Russian Moslems throw in their sympathies with Russia, and did the soldiery amongst them take any prominent part against Turkey? Would they now be prepared to welcome the Turks into that part of Russia which was overwhelmingly Moslem to which reference had been made in the lecturer's survey? When they considered all these questions, it seemed to him that if anyone in the West adopted the mantle of prophecy he would have a big problem in front of him.

Mr. ISPAHANI said he would be obliged if the lecturer would explain to them the condition of the Russian Moslems before the Revolution. From his personal knowledge as a traveller in Russia before the war, when his visits extended to Turkestan and the Caucasus, he could say that the Moslems suffered from harshness of rule. They were not allowed to educate their children in the way they desired and in the practices of their faith. It might well be that more liberal ideas would prevail after the existing confusion in Russia had been overcome.

Sheikh M. H. KIDWAI said they had heard that the Russian Moslems were strongly opposed to the idea of Russia taking over Constantinople. He would like to impress this fact upon Englishmen present who thought there was no restlessness about the present situation as regarded the Moslem position in the war. In India there were numbers of religious leaders

interned because they were said to have had sympathy with the Turks. Mr. Montagu, during his visit, received a great number of telegrams declaring the sympathy of the Mussulman senders with the Turks, not as Turks, but as Moslems.

Mr. TOYNBEE, in reply, said that he had shown that before the war the freedom of the Russian Moslems was very small, and that they were very much suppressed. Their ecclesiastical organisations, like those of other communities not belonging to the Orthodox faith, were very much broken up. There could be no doubt that one general effect of the war and the Revolution had been to evoke in the minds of the Moslems, and especially those which had come under Russian rule in the last century or so, a keen wish to have an independent life of their own, though there were great differences of view as to the proper political means towards this end. They had seen European progress, and wished to share therein on their own lines and in accordance with their own culture. They wished to retain the economic results which had flowed from European organisation. Generally speaking, the attitude of Islam toward Europe had been very much that of Japan.

The meeting concluded with a vote of thanks to the lecturer.